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ABSTRACT

The demographics of American schools are changing. While the actual number of school children has declined, the proportion of minority students, poor students, and students from one parent families has grown steadily. Education must be reformed to address these populations with equity. Strategies which have been adopted, such as more student testing and more teacher evaluation, are not solutions which will help low-achieving students. Concern for female students has waned since the passage of Title IX, but girls and young women are still victims of sex stereotyping, which negatively affects their academic achievement. Recommendations for equity reforms are the following; (1) pass state laws which protect the rights of minorities and guarantee equal opportunities in education; (2) bring community social service agencies, health centers, and recreational programs into the schools; (3) provide on-site day care for parenting students; (4) develop a school-to-work transition for low income-students; (5) create flexible learning opportunities such as part-time and night schools; (6) provide in-service and pre-service training to teachers in methods to overcome racism and sexism; (7) free all tests of bias; (8) improve the quality of instruction before raising requirements; (9) provide preschool enrichment programs; (10) encourage parental involvement; (11) improve school climate; (12) implement affirmative action; (13) provide technical assistance; and (14) make all school programs truly accessible. (VM)

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THE HEART OF EXCELLENCE:
EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND EDUCATIONAL REFORM

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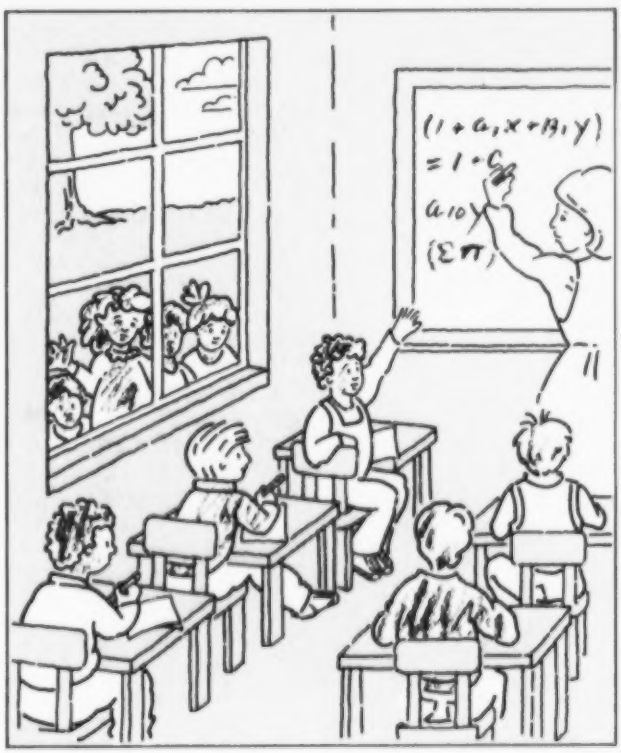
report

NUMBER 6 FALL 1987

The Heart of Excellence:
Equal Opportunities and Educational Reform



Why This Report?

> "The goal of excellence does not even have the female student in mind."[1]

This is not just another education reform report. In the aftermath of *A Nation at Risk*[2] this subject has been dealt with at great length by nearly every group or individual with a stake in education—from state governors to guidance counselors, from teachers to social workers. Although the early reports, including *A Nation at Risk*, simply ignored the implications of education reforms on low-income, minority, disabled and female students, later reports and recommendations have at least recognized that these "other" Americans exist and have needs. Some even go so far as to state that all education reform efforts are doomed to failure if they do not confront the problems of these children vaguely described as "disadvantaged" or "at-risk." None of the reports go beyond the barest mention of sexism and sex discrimination in education—with the exception of *Our Children at Risk*.[3]

The education reform movement has almost completely ignored the role and status of women and girls in education. How schools treat women and girls is not even considered in evaluating the effectiveness of schools. In fact, as Tetreault and Schmuck noted in one of the few articles dealing with sex equity and school reform, the measure of a school's "goodness" is not affected even by visible problems of sex differentiation. The return to more traditional sex-typed course choices and values are not questioned. The relationship between sex segregation in courses and gender segregation in the work force and the feminization of poverty is not discussed.[4] Most reports view the problem of school dropouts as one affecting primarily boys—except when they discuss teen parents, where the drop-out discussion focuses primarily on girls. The blatant sex segregation in vocational education programs is not seen as a problem, nor is the scarcity of women in math and computer science. Inadequate teachers—mostly female—are considered a problem and there are numerous proposals to upgrade and "professionalize" the field. Conversely, there are very few female school administrators, yet no reformer has thought to examine why this is so or to make recommendations for change. Sexual harassment is a fact of life for many female students entering male-dominated professions but none of the proposals for education reform confront this issue.

Advocates for equal education have been pushing for education reform for decades, although they defined it differently. Laws like Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which put teeth into the *Brown* decision to begin desegregating America's schools, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which unlocked career and education opportunities for women, are both pioneering forms of education reform.

Somehow, it seems that equity principles have become educational dinosaurs—creatures whose time has come and gone. This report is written to dispel that belief. It is as

important today as it was 30 years ago to pay attention to students who have low achievement levels, who come from poor families or from families that are outside the mainstream of the dominant white culture, or who are female. It is as clear today as it was yesterday that unless special efforts are made, the new education reform proposals will bypass these students—the majority of the school population.

Sex discrimination is alive and well in America's schools. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 was severely eroded by a 1984 Supreme Court decision, *Grove City College v Bell*, and is no longer a strong sanction against sex discrimination in education. Only 13 states have strong laws in place to protect those rights previously guaranteed under Title IX. The lack of strong federal mandates coupled with an inadequate education reform movement makes it extremely important to illuminate the special needs of women and girls in education. This report is thus written with the hope that some education reformer, policymaker or legislator will gain from it a clear understanding that equal education is not a reality for women and girls.

This report is partially based on PEER's "Speakout on Excellence and Equity" held in October 1986 in Washington, D.C. The Speakout gave parents, educators, students and program providers the opportunity to add their voices to a debate that has too often existed in the rarefied atmosphere of "public policy." Beyond simply stating, as many of the reports do, that "you can't have excellence without equity," the Speakout participants gave PEER concrete examples of what needs to be done in the areas of teenage pregnancy, dropout prevention, vocational education, standardized testing, math and science education, and teaching.

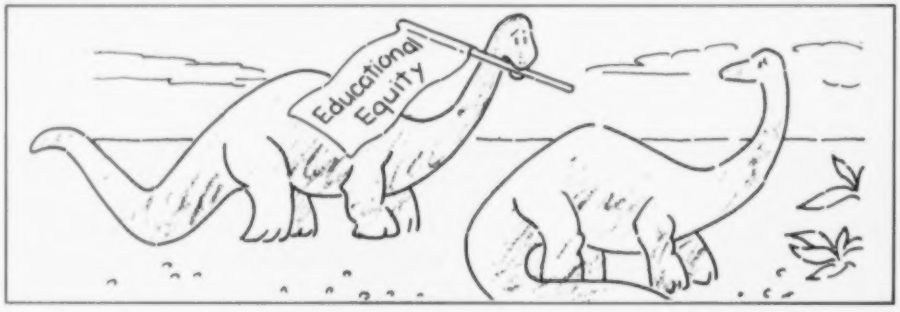
In addition to conveying the views of Speakout participants, this report will also examine some of the more popular education reform proposals which deal with teacher improvement, competency testing, student achievement, dropout prevention and teen pregnancy in the light of the needs of the non-white, non-male and non-middle class portion of the student population—in fact, the majority of the student population. The final section of the report will offer our own feminist education reform agenda. Many of our recommendations are derived from what we see as the best recommendations of other reform proposals, some are a restatement of longstanding principles, and some are based on the recommendations of "Speakout" participants. Taken as a whole these recommendations represent our best current thinking about what is needed to improve the education of women and girls in certain key areas.

Introduction

> "I have dealt with a mentality that says, 'you educate those who are the brightest and the most able and that is who you focus on, and those by the wayside, tough. They are the ones who will go out and be the menial labor.' "
>
> —POLLY BACA
> State Senator, Colorado.[5]

The American public education system has a tough job to do. A free public education is seen as every person's birthright—and public schools are charged with the responsibility of educating boys and girls and men and women who may or may not be English speaking, disabled, poor, low-achieving or high-achieving students, and to do it all well. This challenge is not going to get any less complex. A large share of today's students enrolled in public schools are poor, non-English speaking, members of single-parent families, members of a racial or ethnic minority group or have some combination of these characteristics—characteristics that are often associated with low academic achievement. And the proportion of these students enrolled in schools will increase, not decrease, in the years ahead.[6] In the 1980s the poverty rate rose dramatically. The number of poor children increased by more than three million between 1979 and 1983. A total of 21 percent of all children now live in poverty.[7] In 1983, one out of every six white children, nearly two out of every five Hispanic children and one out of every two Black children were poor.[8] And children who are poor generally have less access to education than middle or high income children. The average child from a family whose income is in the top quarter of the income range gets four years more schooling than the average child whose family income is in the bottom quarter.[9] These poor children are likely to be the children of poor women, who are often raising their families alone on low-salaried jobs. In 1959, only 9 percent of all families were headed by a woman alone. By 1984, 23 percent were, including 60 percent of all Black families. In 1985, more than a third of all female-headed families lived in poverty. This poverty rate is not surprising since the combined impact of education discrimination and employment discrimination yields an average salary for full-time women workers of only $18,088.[10]

Our nation's demographics are also changing. While the actual number of children in schools has declined in recent decades and is expected to decline in the future, the proportion of minority students, including language minority students, has grown steadily and will continue to grow into the 21st century. Between 1976 and 1980, the proportion of minority students rose from 24 percent to almost 27 percent. Asians were the most rapidly expanding group of minority students—the number of Asian students increased by 40 percent during that period, while the number of Hispanic students also increased by 13.2 percent.[11]



High minority enrollments in many urban districts are forcing many schools to deal with language and cultural diversity whether they want to or not. Between 1970 and 1983, the proportion of minority children enrolled in Seattle rose from 20 percent to 48 percent, in San Diego from 25 percent to 50 percent and in Portland, Oregon from 12 percent to 27 percent. Minority enrollments in Los

Angeles grew from 50 percent to 78 percent in 1982.[12]

The combined effect of these social and demographic changes is that poor and minority students can no longer be considered "fringe" elements that can be handled with a few federal or state remedial programs, but rather must be seen as centrally involved in the problems and solutions identified by educational reforms. Equality principles aside, financial reasons alone must drive schools to take action. One report noted a study which found that "each dollar of public investment in alleviating inadequate education was estimated to yield about $6 in additional income to the affected population and almost $2 to the state and federal treasuries."[13]

In addition, the reality that women need to work and will work has still not been factored into the reform formula. Ninety percent of all young women now in school can expect to be in the paid labor force for most of their adult lives, and 40 percent will be the sole support of their families.[14] Yet the educational experience of boys and girls remains different—a difference that is based primarily on the unconscious belief that paid work is not as important to girls as it is to boys. That women and their children constitute the majority of poor people must also be considered when devising strategies to promote excellence in education. When we speak about improving the education of "disadvantaged" students we are in fact speaking about the children of poor women, usually single-parents, whom the educational system has failed. Unfortunately, most reformers assume that "females and males receive an equal education because they are in the same classroom reading the same books."[15]

Education Reform: Implications for Equity

> "The goal of education reform today . . . is excellence, not necessarily fairness and access."[16]

Reforms aimed at measuring and increasing the achievement of elementary and secondary students and improving and evaluating the performance of teachers, have been widely adopted in the states. Although many strategies have been proposed, the reforms aimed at students which have most commonly been adopted include increased high school graduation requirements and minimum competency or basic skills testing as a prerequisite for graduation or grade promotion. For teachers, testing is also seen as a solution, as are tighter certification requirements coupled with some efforts to provide increased financial incentives. These reforms are concrete and easily measured. For the most part, these reforms are not meant to reach low-achieving, minority, disabled or female students and, in fact, often have a detrimental impact on these students.

High School Dropouts and Increased Standards

> "Kids leave schools because schools don't care."
> —HILDA GORE
> Director of Outreach for the Drop Out Prevention Program for New York City Public Schools.[17]

According to the Department of Education, 46 states had established a minimum number of units required for high school graduation as of 1985.[18] Of these, 39 states had increased the number of units required for high school graduation between 1980 and 1985. A large proportion of this increase is due to a "sharp increase" in the number of year-long courses in mathematics and science required for high school graduation.[19]

The fear that increased graduation requirements would increase drop out rates is one that is shared by a variety of groups and individuals. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum noted in their report, *With Consequences for All*, that "the most academically able students are probably those least affected by increased graduation requirements." The Association also warned that "negative consequences are more likely for high school students who do not go on to college. Although nearly three-fourths of today's students graduate from high school, this rate has dropped in recent years while the dropout rate has accelerated."[20] The National Governors Association commented in the "Five Year Dilemma" that increased standards and graduation requirements, while necessary "may initially encourage additional marginal students to drop out."[21] The College Entrance Examination Board, in their report on Black student achievement, noted that "uniform educational requirements, if administered without flexibility and sensitivity, may exacerbate dropout rates, raising standards for some while excluding others from school altogether."[22]

A 1985 survey of school reform by the Council of the Great City Schools of 71 principals in 28 school districts found that drop out rates did increase in some instances as a result of school reforms, although most principals reported positive results in terms of general student achievement. Of the schools surveyed, 90 percent had increased graduation requirements and 13 percent reported increased student drop out rates.[23]

Today, young women are dropping out of school at an alarming rate. The Census Bureau recently reported that 400,000 girls aged 14 to 17 were not enrolled in school and that 1.3 million young women aged 18 to 21 had not graduated from high school. According to a National Center for Education Statistics study on students who leave school before graduation, the national dropout rate for male students is 14.7 percent while the female dropout rate is almost as high at 12.6 percent. For students living in urban areas, the dropout rate is considerably higher for both male and female students; for male students the study showed a dropout rate of 20.8 percent and a rate of 17 percent for female students. Some urban school systems have reported losing 50 percent of their students before graduation. The numbers are even more dramatic for Hispanic women. In 1980, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that one in three Hispanic females dropped out of high school—a dropout rate which is twice as high as the national rate.

Boys and girls drop out of school for many of the same reasons. The number one reason both boys and girls give for dropping out of high schools is alienation—a sense that school is not a place for them. This alienation is associated with low achievement levels. According to the Center for Education Statistics, "poor academic performance is the best predictor of who drops out of school" for both boys and girls.[24] A student with a "D" average is five times more likely to leave school than a student with a "B" average.[25]

Both boys and girls drop out of school to go to work, although boys are more likely to leave for this reason. These similarities contradict the generally-held assumption that girls and boys leave school for entirely different reasons—the girls because they are pregnant, the boys to go to work. One Speakout participant explained, "I dropped

out because I thought I had it all. I had a minimum wage job and I thought that's all there was."[26] This reason—offered by a young woman, Florence Hollins—could have just as easily been offered by a young man. It is common that work competes—often successfully—for a student's time and attention, especially if the student must work for economic reasons. In fact, students who work more than 20 hours a week are more likely to drop out than those who do not work at all.[27] Jeff Sikkou, a student at Howard County Vocational Technical Center, offered his view of why young people leave school—"because of drugs, peer pressure, teen pregnancy, also that they think education is not important."[28] Only one of the listed reasons applies exclusively to females, the remainder are common to both boys and girls.

Where the sexes do differ is that girls are likely to leave school if they become pregnant or get married while boys are more likely to leave school to go to work. Even pregnancy can be traced back to academic difficulties—young women with poor basic skills are more than three times as likely to become teen parents as those with average or better basic skills—a problem male and female dropouts share.[29] However, the differences are important because they call for different strategies for retaining young people in school. Too often, dropout prevention strategies are aimed solely at young men. As one state government official put it, "the dropout rates are almost as high for girls as they are for boys . . . I often find that women are invisible in the discussion."[30] If dropout prevention strategies do focus on young women, they are nearly always grounded in the assumption that girls drop out because of pregnancy and parenthood—an assumption which ignores the multitude of teenage girls who drop out for different reasons.

The lack of a high school diploma has serious economic consequences for both boys and girls—two-thirds of all economically disadvantaged people have not completed high school.[31] Young women who fail to complete high school pay a higher price than young men in terms of economic stability: "in March 1985, among females 25-64 years of age, only 44 percent of non-graduates were employed while 73 percent of male non-graduates the same age were employed."[32]

The rush to raise standards and increase graduation requirements at best will have no impact on schools' abilities to improve the performance of low-achieving students or to retain young people in school. Unless these measures have strong remedial components coupled with a strong emphasis on increasing skills and achievement levels for all students, these reforms may actually drive more students away. As *Barriers to Excellence* notes, "if schools set high standards and simultaneously communicate to students that they do not believe they can meet those standards, many children will certainly fail."[33]

At worst, increased graduation requirements may help create a two track system—one for the high achieving elite, another for drop outs, laborers, service workers and vocational education students. This division is likely to replicate racial and economic class lines. Although this division is not new to the education system, the emphasis on higher standards is likely to intensify the differences between races and income levels. Already, Black students are more likely to be enrolled in special education programs and less likely to be enrolled in programs for the gifted and talented than are white students.[34] For these students, the new requirements may reduce rather than enhance educational opportunities. If current trends continue, "there is a rising danger that only students privileged to go on to college will have opportunities to experience education specialized beyond a few core subjects."[35] The emphasis on increased standards (without appropriate remediation) may succeed in increasing overall achievement levels by forcing marginal students out, which would allow the average test scores to rise.

Teen Pregnancy

> "Jobs are much harder to find when people find out that you are pregnant."
>
> —ANGEL DAY
> 17-year-old mother and student at Howard County Vocational Technical Center.[36]

Teenage pregnancy is probably the only arena where young women are the focus of reformers. Most prevention strategies focus on the individual responsibility of the teenage girl to prevent parenthood, none focus on the responsibility of school and society to create a climate that encourages young women to think beyond the stereotyped expectations that their main role should be wife and/or mother.

Four out of 10 of today's 14 year[illegible]-girls will become pregnant at least once before they [illegible]e age of 20. An estimated 40 percent of 18 year-o[illegible]ers have not completed high school. For Black [illegible]e girls, the chance of becoming both a teen mother and a high school drop-out is much greater than it is for their white counterparts. According to data from the Alan Guttmacher Institute, for every 10,000 Black unmarried 15 to 17 year old women, there are about 1400 who become pregnant, 700 who give birth and 660 who raise their children alone. The Children's Defense Fund's Clearinghouse on Adolescent Pregnancy reports that Black teens account for only 14 percent of the adolescent population but for 28 percent of all adolescent births and 47 percent of all births to unmarried teens.

Yet the problem of teen pregnancy should not be seen as unique to poor or minority communities; "it does a disservice to the minority population and it lets policy makers off the hook."[37] In fact, the rate of births to Black teens dropped by 10 percent between 1970 and 1981, while the rate of births to white teens rose 57 percent during this same period. Data from the National Center for Health Statistics reveal an alarmingly high rate of adolescent births among Hispanic women as well. In 1981, 19 percent of Mexican-American mothers were under 20, as were 23 percent of Puerto Rican mothers. Regardless of race or ethnicity teen mothers are likely to face high unemployment rates (90 percent) and/or rely on public assistance (66 percent).

One dropout prevention expert in a big-city school system has noted that "there is a very high correlation between lack of academic success and teenage pregnancy, but . . . the lack of academic success is an earlier symptom. The main cause is these feelings of worthlessness as a human being. There really does seem to be a very high correlation between lack of self-esteem and teenage pregnancy."[38] A major factor affecting young women's aspirations and self-image has received less attention than any other: **the impact of sex role stereotypes**. As another city official commented, "One of the reasons women's self-esteem is so low is that they are still bombarded with sexist expectations."[39] Many teen mothers hold traditional ideas about the "appropriate" roles of women which define them

only as wives and mothers. For these teens, motherhood is the first step toward achieving that goal. All too often, however, the teen father offers little support to the mother or drops out of the picture entirely. In the words of Angel Day, a 17-year-old mother: "My boyfriend was very much against my having this baby, so he left me. A few months later, he called me and said that he wanted to take responsibility. Now that the baby is here things between us have fallen once more. If I were to advise other teenagers, I would suggest to them to wait and know for sure that the father is going to take responsibility for the child."[40]

Dr. Renee Jenkins, a specialist in adolescent medicine at Howard University Hospital, recommends that "curriculum issues related to life skills development and to decision making and other coping techniques" be "emphasized as much as sex education in the effort to prevent teen pregnancies."[41]

The availability of contraceptives can do little to counteract a young woman's notion that she should, on the one hand, "submit" to pressure to engage in sexual relationships at an early age while, on the other hand, not appear to be anticipating a sexual encounter by being prepared with contraceptives when she goes on a date. Nor can the availability of contraceptives ensure that a young woman determined to be "grown up" and to keep her boyfriend will use them. As many of the young women profiled in Leon Dash's *Washington Post* series about teen parents admitted, their fantasy of motherhood, their desire for its special status among their peers, combined with the conviction that their employment futures are bleak, outweighed considerations of chastity or contraception.

Education for the Future: Mathematics, Science, Computer and Vocational Education

> "We women have to be extra sharp in our math and science so when we apply for the job there can be no argument for who is the better choice."
>
> —16-year-old
> DENICKA CLARK[42]

The drive to increase graduation requirements arises, in part, from the desire to improve mathematics and science education. Increasing graduation requirements in these key areas was seen as one concrete solution to a national crisis—the shortage of high school graduates who are competent in mathematics and science. However, the increased graduation requirements in mathematics and science have not really gone to the heart of the problem—many high school programs are still not offering a high quality of instruction in these fields. A 1987 survey, released by the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA), showed that 7,100 of the nation's 16,000 high schools offer no physics courses, 4,200 offer no chemistry courses and 1,900 offer no courses in biology. Only one-third of the students in grades 10 through 12 are in science courses. The Executive Director of NSTA was skeptical that increasing graduation requirements would improve science education by itself and was concerned that these increased requirements would encourage students who were "not in the pipeline" for math and science careers to drop out.[43]

The curricular areas experiencing the most segregation in schools tend to track segregation in the job market—mathematics, science, including computer science, and vocational education. These are also the career areas where experts predict there will be a high demand for skilled, qualified professionals in the decades ahead. However, none of the reform proposals have suggested strategies to increase the number of minority males or women in the mathematics and science pipeline. In fact, for the most part, this educational segregation is not even recognized as a problem.

Nationally, only 10.6 percent of college bound high school women indicate a desire to major in physical sciences—course work leading to significant scientific and professional careers that traditionally have been male bastions—as compared to 34 percent of male seniors.[44] Of the women who received bachelor's degrees in 1980-81, only three percent received degrees in the physical sciences, mathematics, and engineering, while 23 percent of the women earned degrees in education and 11 percent of the women majored in nursing and health-related professions.[45]

Boys outnumber girls in high school programming classes. Data from the 1984 National Assessment of Educational Progress indicate that 20.3 percent of 13 year old males and 16.5 percent of the 13 year old females reported taking at least one computer class per week.[46]Girls are less likely to participate in extracurricular computer activities, such as computer clubs and computer camps and more likely to take courses such as data entry and word processing. This separation extends to college and into the work place.

As one computer specialist explained, "in college, computer science is a male-dominated domain. There are virtually no Blacks, no Hispanics involved in the program. We have women out there in the workforce who are being displaced because they don't have a computer understanding and a computer background."[47] Researchers have even invented a new disease "cybrophobia"—fear of computers, which supposedly victimizes women in particular—to justify the lack of women in computer science.

Sophomore college student Sue Sczublek brought to life the reality of dry statistics when she talked about female college students in 1986. "When you ask any girl on campus, nine times out of ten her major is not going to be science or math. It is usually English or something like that." Even when girls do enroll in science and math classes, she continued, "teachers call more on boys and pay more serious attention to their questions."[48]

Segregation in schools leads to segregation in the job market. According to the National Academy of Sciences, half of all Americans work in jobs that are 80 percent male or female. Of the 503 separate, detailed job categories listed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, five of the top ten occupations employing women are in sales and clerical work. Conversely, women are only 10 percent of the scientists and engineers; and while minorities represent approximately 18 percent of the population, they are only two percent of the scientists and engineers.[49]

Dr. Arthur Jones, founder of Fairfax County, Virginia's SHARE project (School-Home Alliance to Revitalize Education), stressed the importance of role models for female and minority students in mathematics and science. The reasons that "young girls are not doing well in math is not that they don't have the ability any more than I would say the minority youngsters—they don't have the role models. They are not pushed into the higher level classes." Dr. Jones noted that even when boys and girls are in the same class they are treated differently. "A lot of times you go into a math class, and I don't care even if a woman is teaching a class, the woman pays more attention to the young boys in the class than the young girls."[50]

Vocational education, on the other hand, has been the stepchild of the education reform movement. Very little has been proposed or adopted aimed at upgrading vocational education—although young women's access to quality vocational education programs has traditionally been limited. High school vocational education programs, where students train for specific occupations, remain largely race- and sex-segregated. Women comprise only 13 percent of the enrollment in programs that have traditionally been dominated by men—including technical fields.[51] Nationally, of the students completing a vocational program in computer and information science in 1984, 82 percent were white—but only 63 percent of the students in vocational home economics were white. Female students are only 13 percent of the graduates in engineering, but are nearly 90 percent of the graduates in allied health professions.[52]

Vocational education is too often seen as a dumping ground for low-achieving students to bide their time before graduation. Too little emphasis is placed on academic or vocational quality—"at the high school level, Blacks are underrepresented in academic programs and overrepresented in vocational education programs where they receive less educational preparation in areas such as English, mathematics, and science, and therefore they lose ground in terms of educational achievement." Furthermore, "Black students in vocational education programs are enrolled earlier and more extensively in programs training specifically for low-status occupations than are white students. Typically these assignments are made by school personnel rather than by election of students or by their parents."[53]

Girls in non-traditional vocational classes often confront outright discrimination and hostility, from teachers and from their peers. The girl in the non-traditional class may often be the only girl and will likely be ignored, teased or harassed. Patty McIntyre, a student in auto body repair, told of her experience in one vocational school. "I couldn't work. The only thing that I could do was sand (the cars) and I couldn't put things in or anything. I was ignored because I was the only girl there and it was really hard. I had to most of the times stay in the classroom and write estimates."[54]

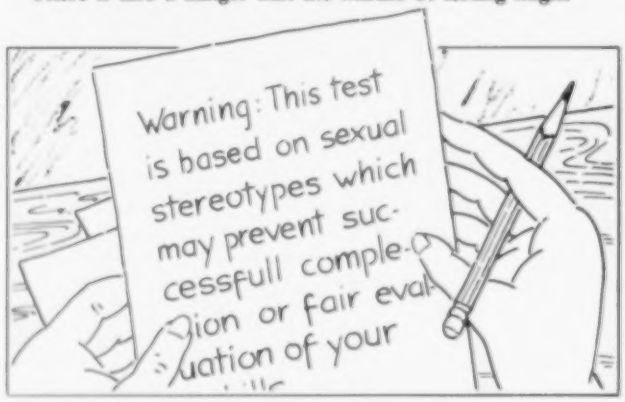
Student Testing

> "I am sure that if boys were getting higher grades and lower test scores, the test would be rewritten."[55]

As of 1985, 25 states require high school graduates to pass a minimum competency test and a total of 45 states have a minimum competency testing program used for a variety of purposes, including grade promotion, high school graduation and remediation.[56]

Standardized tests are often used as the criteria for placing children in ability groups, ostensibly for remediation. Twenty-one states use minimum competency testing for remediation.[57] However, testing can be used as a mechanism for segregation within schools, with low ability children isolated in curricula that are less challenging and rigorous than those available to the average or high ability students. Once placed, "first or second grade children who are tracked . . . will likely remain in the assigned track for the duration of their schooling."[58] An extreme example of this misuse of tests can be found in the Dillon County school district in South Carolina. This school district used students' combined score on achievement tests in math, reading and language arts to place them in ability groups, where they remained throughout the school day. The U.S. Department of Education found that the tracking system results in high ability groups that are predominately white and low ability groups that are predominately Black—54 percent of the classes in the school district are "racially identifiable." Although Dillon County officials claimed the practice was "educationally justifiable," many students were actually misassigned to remedial programs. For example, a student with good reading skills but with deficiencies in math would be taught at the same watered-down level in both subject areas.

There is also a danger that the misuse of testing might



increase the risk of low-achieving students being inappropriately labeled handicapped. Too often our schools "use the hard-won and sorely needed system of special education as a resegregation mechanism to exclude poor and minority children from the regular classroom."[59] As an alternative, schools should "assign students to relatively fluid learning groups on the basis of their understanding of and achievement in a subject at a given time."[60]

Seven states use minimum competency testing for grade promotion—a student who fails this test would be retained in grade.[61] This policy is aimed at curbing the number of children who are promoted from grade to grade and eventually graduate without mastering the basic skills. However, retaining children in grade does not automatically lead to improved learning and often causes children to lag further behind. The National Governors' Association has noted that "being retained one grade increases the risk of later dropping out by 40-50 percent."[62] Despite questionable benefits, "pressure is increasing to retain children in elementary grades." And once again, "this burden falls disproportionately on low-income and minority children."[63]

In most schools, the measure of student success is the score on a standardized test. It was the steady fall of national Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores that provided positive proof that the quality of American education was declining. It is more and more common to rate the performance of entire school districts on the average SAT or other standardized test scores of the students in that district. However, standardized tests have inherent weaknesses, especially those tests that rely heavily on multiple-choice questions. Although scores on standardized tests are often the sole criterion for judging achievement or ability, these tests, in fact, measure a limited range of abilities or achievements. According to the College Board, "there is some evidence that the skills represented on minimum competency tests are not enabling skills that lead to higher order thinking abilities. Instructional programs built around competency tests tend to emphasize rote

learning at the expense of higher order cognitive skills."[64] Between 1972 and 1980, use of teaching methods that might encourage the development of higher order thinking abilities—project or laboratory work, writing tasks and student-centered discussion—"declined in public high schools."[65] The reform solution—higher requirements and stiffer evaluation—does not address this problem.

Despite its deficiencies, standardized tests, particularly the SATs, are still overwhelmingly used as the yardsticks to measure student achievement. It is the standardized test that supposedly reveals the deficiencies of girls and women in mathematics and science, and the inferior educational achievements of minority students. Yet is it the test or the test-taker that is deficient?

Boys and girls frequently score differently on standardized tests. The SAT is often used to measure improvements in individual and school achievement, as well as a major criterion for admission into college. SAT scores, which declined during the '70s and caused much dismay among education reformers, have started to rise during the past two years. Minority scores also rose slightly during that period, but the gap between males and females has risen. In 1985, males outscored females by an average of 59 points on the SAT—47 points on the math section and 12 points on the verbal section.[66] For minority women, "the SAT is a double whammy. They all score lower than the men in their ethnic group and all minority men, except for Asian American men, score lower than white women."[67]

The accepted explanation for this difference in test scores has been that girls in general lag behind boys in mathematical ability. As a result, girls "are going through life thinking they are dumber because everybody thinks that SAT scores are an IQ score; and, they also think that they are dumber in math and science."[68]

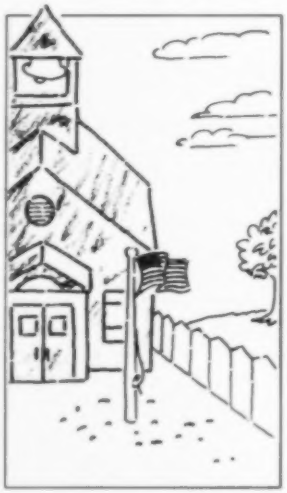
The SAT is definitely not an IQ test and fails to do what it purports to do—predict the freshman grades of female test-takers. The College Board and the Educational Testing Service (ETS) have admitted that the SAT underpredicts the grades women can expect to earn in college. In fact, women frequently get better grades in college math courses than men. The ETS cannot explain this discrepancy. However, there are several explanations which point to sex bias in the construction and content of the test. For example, the SAT shows "the familiar bias of male dominance—many more references to males than females in traditional roles are presented."[69] More of the test questions are set in a science context (where girls and women still are often discouraged from participating) rather than in the humanities, an area where women have traditionally been encouraged to excel. Further, the essay writing test in the verbal section and the data sufficiency question in the math section have been removed from the test—items on which female students formerly excelled.[70]

The impact of these lower test scores reaches far beyond the damage it does to the self-esteem of women and minority males. It has helped perpetuate the myth that girls are not meant to excel in quantitative areas, such as mathematics and science, and has discouraged young women from choosing these fields. It limits access to higher education—SAT scores are used as cut-off scores for about 40 percent of the colleges and universities.[71] It also decreases young women's chances of gaining some scholarships. The National Merit Scholarships are based on the preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test. Although National Merit has tried to compensate for the difference in test scores, "boys are still getting 60 percent of the scholarships and girls are getting 40 percent."[72] The Empire State Scholarships in New York are based entirely on SAT scores, with the predictable result that many more boys than girls succeed in winning these $10,000 grants. "A test that is taken by 800,000 females every year should be accurately predicting their freshman year grades. And since this isn't, I feel that it should be illegal."[73]

Reforming Teaching and Teachers: Victims or Villains?

> "I am hard pressed to think of a more important vocation than the preparation of the youth of this society to function effectively in that society, whether it be during the computer age or the stone age."
>
> —MADELINE MURRAY
> College student majoring in Education.[74]

Reforming the teaching profession has been a major focus of reform proposals. Teachers, primarily women, have faced charges of desertion—for leaving their fields for more lucrative professions—and dereliction—because the teachers who remained or replaced qualified teachers were judged to be inferior in skills and training.



Traditionally low-paid, the teaching profession has been one field where women were allowed to dominate. The low-pay, lack of advancement opportunities, difficult working conditions, and low-status of teaching drove qualified professionals away from schools. Female teachers somehow bear the brunt of the blame for the decay in education—either for leaving the field when other more attractive post-graduate and career options (such as law and medicine) were available or for failing to act as "professional" as lawyers and doctors.

Many of the recommendations for improving the teaching profession, such as the Carnegie Forum proposal to "professionalize" teaching, are revolutionary. With the exception of stricter standards (such as testing of practice teachers and new teachers and increased standards for teacher education), the reforms that have actually been adopted are primarily monetary inducements—namely, increased teacher salaries, merit pay, master teacher plans, and education grants programs. According to *Teacher Education Policy in the States*, a 1984-85 survey of 50 states and the District of Columbia, conducted by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, more than half the states have increased teacher salaries or established new minimum salaries. Fifteen states have established initiatives to draw students to the teaching profession.

Better than half of the states now require competency testing at some point in the professional preparation of the teacher. Two-thirds of the states have mandated the raising of standards for schools, colleges and departments of education, such as increased grade point average (GPA) requirements. The majority of states—78 percent—are implementing or considering revised certification standards.[75]

There seems to be little consideration given to whether these reforms will have a detrimental impact on access to educational careers. For example, although the vast majority of states have some form of required testing for teachers, only a handful are even "studying" the impact of the tests to ensure that a disproportionate number of minority teachers are not screened out by the tests. Fewer still have adopted policies or programs to ensure that these reforms are equitable. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education survey listed approximately 14 states that included some sort of equity measure in their teacher education policies and many of these were still in the planning stages or were extremely limited in scope.

Teacher competency tests are supposed to prevent unqualified persons from entering the profession and to identify currently unqualified existing teachers. However, teacher testing by itself will not increase the quality of teaching. "Even if tests do sort out less qualified teacher candidates, they do not address the overall problem of improving the attractiveness of teaching and increasing the pool of academically talented recruits."[76]

Testing, even when free of race, sex and cultural bias, often falls short of accomplishing its task. Although it is necessary for teachers to establish their credentials in some way, standardized tests are only one part of the assessment. Teachers "should prove their competency as practitioners. Standardized tests cannot cover this entire task." Teachers' performance on standardized tests "are very poor predictors" of their capacity to teach subjects well.[77]

Very few states have taken precautions to ensure that tests are free of bias prior to implementation of these testing programs, although some plan to assess the impact as the program progresses. For example, there is proposed legislation in Massachusetts to require basic skills tests to be free of racial or ethnic bias.[78]

Recently, the Alabama Board of Education lost a lawsuit filed by two traditionally Black colleges charging that Alabama's teacher certification test discriminates against Black candidates. Blacks passed at about one-half the rate of whites and the test was used as the sole criterion for certification. As, Donald Watkins, the prevailing attorney in the case commented, "the public perception is that if you don't have a test that a large proportion of minorities fail, it's not a hard test."[79] The test itself had never been validated prior to the time it was first administered. In addition, students were not given proper notice that they were going to have to take the test. The court ruled, among other things, that GPA and test scores should be weighted equally and that there must be a field try-out for the test.

Loan forgiveness programs for teachers are also extremely popular in the states. Twenty-six states have loan forgiveness programs, predominately for math and science teachers. All but one, North Carolina, adopted these policies after 1980. None of the states have adopted policies to ensure that women or minority males, populations that are traditionally underrepresented as science and math teachers, participate in these programs. Financial need is a factor in only five states. These loan programs "are usually geared to recruit top academic students into teaching . . . financial need, long the cornerstone of student assistance is often absent in these programs."[80]

It is not clear that the states' loan forgiveness programs will have any real impact on the supply of qualified mathematics and science teachers. It is clear, however, that states generally did not seize the opportunity to increase equity when they initiated their reforms. Instead, they developed programs that, at best, will retain the status quo, and, at worst, decrease the number of women and minority male math and science teachers.

Public schools have a vast pool of qualified female teachers available for promotion into the administrative ranks but only a handful of women run schools. In fact, the percentage of women superintendents has actually declined since the 1950s. Even at the elementary school level, where there are the highest number of women principals, women are still vastly underrepresented. In 1984-85 women comprised over 83 percent of elementary school teachers, but only one-fourth of elementary schools were run by women.[81] Compare this to 1928 when women accounted for more than 50 percent of principals.[82] Overall, women are over two-thirds of the teachers but only slightly over one-fifth of school principals.[83]

No reform report has looked at the phenomenon of the disappearing female administrator or even identified this as a problem. However, there are studies which show that in schools and districts with female administrators, achievement in reading and math is higher, there is less violence and higher morale.[84] In fact, female administrators tend to be particularly effective administrators—better communicators, more involved with parents and students, and more supportive of teachers than their male counterparts. Women administrators "create a climate more conducive to learning, one that is more orderly, safer and quieter."[85] In general, "the description of schools headed by women tend to sound very similar to the description of excellent schools."[86]

Despite this, no reform report has decried the shortage of female school administrators or laid the blame for the decline in educational quality on the shoulders of male administrators. Female school administrators have already discovered what it takes to create "effective" schools, yet no reformer has suggested studying the techniques of the typical female school administrator and applying these methods to male-run schools.

Recommendations for Equity Reforms

The reforms that have been implemented thus far have been simple measures of the easily quantifiable. Increased testing seems to lead to improved performance on standardized tests, but whether or not achievement is truly attained is questionable. The Carnegie report emphasizes that teacher incentives should be related to student performance, but admits that there is no adequate measure in existence.[87] New studies have indicated that the teacher shortage may be easing, perhaps because of increased salaries.

Few, if any, states have implemented educational reforms which address the special needs of girls, women, disabled, poor, or non-English speaking students, drop-outs, or teen parents. The new wave of reform proposals, however, are finally noting concern for these groups.

The following PEER recommendations represent the best of other reports as well as our own thinking.

1. Pass state laws that protect the rights of women, people of color and disabled persons and guarantee equal opportunities in education. These laws would help ensure access to a full range of academic and extracurricular programs for all students, including athletics, mathematics and science education, computer education and vocational education.

2. Bring the community into the schools. House within the school walls social service agencies, health centers, community and recreational programs that will make the school a hub of activity and provide, under one roof, those services that students are likely to need.

3. Provide on-site day care for parenting students. The lack of affordable, quality child care is a major barrier to young women staying in school or returning to school after becoming parents.

4. Concentrate on developing the school-to-work transition for low-income students, particularly those in danger of dropping out. One approach might be the "job developer" position being piloted in New York City schools. The job developer is on staff at the school and has responsibility for job counseling and referral. *Make Something Happen: Hispanics and Urban High School Reform* suggests building in-school substitutes for the "informal channels available to most middle-class white youths," in making the transition from school to work (or college). The report also suggests "carefully targeted and designed work programs that link the business community and education."[88]

5. The National Governors Association recommends "creating flexible learning opportunities" for students who drop out, such as part-time schools and night schools, with support services, such as child care.[89]

6. Provide both in-service and pre-service training to teachers in methods designed to overcome sexism, racism and classism in classroom instruction. Make sure that the curriculum and curricular materials are non-biased and racially, sexually and culturally inclusive. Develop programs to provide role models and mentors for students pursuing careers that are not traditionally associated with their race or sex, for example, mathematics, physical science and computer science.

7. Make certain that all standardized tests are free of race, sex and cultural bias. Use standardized tests as only one indicator of a child's overall performance and use primarily as a tool for remedial intervention. Do not use competency tests as the criterion for graduation or grade promotion, *unless* there is an extensive remediation component in place and students are given sufficient time for improvement. Avoid the placement of children in rigid tracking systems or the retention of students in grades without appropriate remediation.

8. High school graduation requirements should only be increased in conjunction with concerted efforts to improve the quality of instruction at lower grade levels along with efforts to increase the achievement of those children traditionally excluded from the educational mainstream.

9. Intervene at the earliest possible moment. Provide pre-school enrichment programs for children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Identify and begin to remediate problem areas by the first or second grade.

10. Encourage parental involvement at all levels, in school activities and in home activities. When needed, provide education and training for parents so they can be more effectively involved in their child's education.

11. Create a school climate that is welcoming to all students. For example, develop school programs to curb racial and sexual harassment and to encourage acceptance of cultural diversity.

12. Take affirmative steps to increase the number of women and minority males in administrative positions in schools.

13. Provide technical assistance and information to school personnel on equity issues and state, federal and local requirements for equity.

14. Make sure all school programs are truly accessible to all students, including computer clubs, honor societies, athletic programs and advanced math classes, regardless of a student's race, sex, national origin, or disability.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Mary K. Tetreault and Patricia Schmuck, "Equity, Educational Reform, and Gender," *Issues in Education: Technicism and Equity in Education*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1985, p. 53.

[2]Prepared by the U.S. Department of Education's National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983.

[3]Prepared by the National Coalition of Advocates for Students in 1985.

[4]Tetrault and Schmuck, p. 56.

[5]Panelist at PEER Speakout, October 22, 1986.

[6]Joyce Stern and Mary Fraser Williams (ed.), *The Condition of Education*, (Washington, D.C.: Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 1986), p. 151.

[7]Stern and Williams, p. 149.

[8]*Ibid.*, p. 149.

[9]National Coalition of Advocates for Students, *Barriers to Excellence: Our Children at Risk*, (Boston, Massachusetts, 1985), p. 5.

[10]Stern and Williams, p. 150.

[11]Stern and Williams, p. 144.

[12]Stern and Williams, p. 146.

[13]Henry M. Levin, *Educational Reform for Disadvantaged Students: An Emerging Crisis*, (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1986), p. 35.

[14]*Fulfilling the Promise: A Guide to the Sex Equity Provisions of the Vocational Education Act*, (Washington, D.C.: Project on Equal Education Rights, NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, 1985), p. 1.

[15]Tetrault and Schmuck, p. 51.

[16]Denis Doyle and Terry W. Hartle, *Excellence in Education: The*

States Take Charge (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy, 1985), p. 44.

[17]Speaker at PEER Speakout, October, 1986.

[18]Stern and Williams, p. 92.

[19]Stern and Williams, p. 93.

[20]*With Consequences for All: A Report from the ASCD Task Force on Increased High School Graduation Requirements*, (Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1985), p. v.

[21]*The Five Year Dilemma*, (Washington, D.C.: National Governors Association, 1986), p. 7.

[22]*Equality and Excellence: The Educational Status of Black Americans* (College Entrance Examination Board: New York, 1985), p. 3.

[23]Thomas R. Owens, *Final Report for the Council of Great City Schools' Secondary School Improvement Study*, (Washington, D.C.: Council of the Great City Schools, 1985).

[24]Stern and Williams, p. 158.

[25]Stern and Williams, p. 164.

[26]Speaker at PEER Speakout, October 1986. Florence Hollins became a teen mother after dropping out. She later enrolled in a special program at West Side High School in New York City and is now gainfully employed in a responsible position.

[27]Stern and Williams, p. 164.

[28]Speaker, PEER Speakout, October, 1986.

[29]Cynthia Brown and Glenda Partee, "Sex Equity in Education," *The Women's Economic Justice Agenda: Ideas for the States*, (Washington, D.C.: Center for Policy Alternatives), p. 159.

[30]Judith Avner, Director of the Women's Division, Office of the Governor of New York, at PEER Speakout, October 1986.

[31]*The Five Year Dilemma*, p. 5.

[32]Brown and Partee, p. 159.

[33]*Barriers to Excellence*, p. 7.

[34]*Equality and Excellence: The Educational Status of Black Americans*, p. 2.

[35]*With Consequences for All*, p. 7.

[36]Speaker at PEER Speakout, October 1986.

[37]Linda Tarr-Whelan, President and Executive Director, National Center for Policy Alternatives, PEER Speakout, October 1986.

[38]Hilda Gore, Director of Outreach for the Drop-Out Prevention Program in the New York City Public Schools, PEER Speakout, October 1986.

[39]Audrey Rowe, Special Assistant to the Mayor for Social Services of the District of Columbia, PEER Speakout, October 1986.

[40]Speaker, PEER Speakout, October 1986.

[41]Speaker, PEER Speakout, October 1986.

[42]Speaker, PEER Speakout, October 1986.

[43]Barbara Vobejka, "Science Teachers Deplore Lack of Basic Courses in Secondary School," *Washington Post*, March 29, 1987, p. A3.

[44]*The 1986 PEER Report Card: A State-by-State Survey of the Status of Women and Girls in America's Schools*, (Washington, D.C.: Project on Equal Education Rights, NOW LDEF, 1986).

[45]*The 1986 PEER Report Card.*

[46]*Beyond the Star Trek Syndrome to an Egalitarian Future: Where No One Has Gone Before*, (Washington, D.C.: Project on Equal Education Rights, NOW LDEF, 1986), p. 2.

[47]Janet McLeod, Technical Program Manager, Computer Science Center, University of Maryland, Speaker, PEER Speakout, October 1986.

[48]Sue Sczublek, Speaker, PEER Speakout, October 1986.

[49]*Beyond the Star Trek Syndrome*, p. 7.

[50]Dr. Arthur Jones, Speaker, PEER Speakout, October 1986.

[51]*The PEER Report Card: Update on Women and Girls in America's Schools—A State-by-State Survey*, (Washington, D.C.: Project on Equal Education Rights, NOW LDEF, 1985).

[52]*Ibid.*, p. 4.

[53]*Equality and Excellence: The Educational Status of Black Americans*, pp. 2-3.

[54]Speaker, PEER Speakout, October 1986.

[55]Phyllis Rosser, free-lance writer, contributing editor to Ms. Magazine, Speaker, PEER Speakout, October 1986.

[56]Stern and Williams, p. 95.

[57]Stern and Williams, p. 225.

[58]*Barriers to Excellence*, p. 7.

[59]*Barriers to Excellence*, p. 7.

[60]*Ibid.*, p. 43.

[61]Stern and Williams, p. 225.

[62]*The 1991 Task Force Updates* (Washington, D.C.: National Governors' Association), p. 7.

[63]*Barriers to Excellence*, p. 40.

[64]*Equality and Excellence: The Educational Status of Black Americans*, p. 4.

[65]*Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

[66]*The 1986 PEER Report Card*, p. 3.

[67]Phyllis Rosser, Speaker, PEER Speakout, October 1986.

[68]*Ibid.*

[69]*Ibid.*

[70]*The PEER Report Card*, p. 3.

[71]Phyllis Rosser, Speaker, PEER Speakout, October 1986.

[72]*Ibid.*

[73]*Ibid.*

[74]Speaker, PEER Speakout, October 1986.

[75]*Teacher Education Policy in the States: 50-State Survey of Legislative and Administrative Actions*, (Washington, D.C.: Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1985).

[76]*Equality and Excellence: The Educational Status of Black Americans*, p. 4.

[77]*Tomorrow's Teachers*, (East Lansing, Michigan: The Holmes Group, April 1986).

[78]*Teacher Education Policy in the States*, p. 46.

[79]Donald Watkins at a conference, *Testing Reform Initiatives: 1987 and Beyond* (Washington, D.C.).

[80]Irene K. Spero, *The Use of Student Financial Aid to Attract Prospective Teachers: A Survey of State Efforts*, (Washington, D.C.: The College Entrance Examination Board, 1986), p. 5.

[81]*1985 PEER Report Card*, p. 2.

[82]Glen Harvey, "Finding Reality Among the Myths: Why What You Thought About Sex Equity in Education Isn't So," *Phi Delta Kappan*, March 1986, p. 511.

[83]*1985 PEER Report Card*, p. 2.

[84]Carol Shakeshaft, "A Gender At Risk," *Phi Delta Kappan*, March 1986, p. 502.

[85]*Ibid.*, p. 503.

[86]*Ibid.*, p. 503.

[87]*A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*, (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986).

[88]*Make Something Happen: Hispanics and Urban High School Reform*, (Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Secondary Schooling for Hispanics, 1984), p. 36.

[89]*The Five Year Dilemma*, p. 1.

PEER, the Project on Equal Education Rights of the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, is one of the leading national advocacy programs for educational equity for women and girls of all racial and ethnic groups, both disabled and non-disabled.

PEER's National Affiliate Network links activists and educators in a national community of concern for the advancement of women and girls.

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